

Message Text

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PAGE 01 LISBON 00703 01 OF 03 030926Z

12

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 3 LISBON 703

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SUBJ: PORTUGAL'S PARTIES FACE THE FUTURE: THE FAR LEFT

REF: (A) LISBON 644 (DTG 300715Z JAN 76), (B) LISBON 261
(DTG 141017Z JAN 76), (C) LISBON 143 (DTG 090645Z JAN 76)

SUMMARY: THIS MESSAGE IS THE LAST IN THE SERIES REPORTING ON
PORTUGAL'S FIVE MAJOR POLITICAL PARTIES. THE PORTUGUESE FAR
LEFT WAS THE BIG LOSER IN THE ABORTIVE NOV 25 COUP.
THE CREDIBILITY OF ITS ARMED MILITIAS HAS BEEN
TARNISHED, ITS INTERNAL UNITY SHATTERED, AND ITS FORMER
TACIT ALLIANCE WITH THE COMMUNIST PARTY DESTROYED. SOME
CHANGES IN LEADERSHIP HAVE OCCURRED IN THE WAKE OF THE COUP,
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PAGE 02 LISBON 00703 01 OF 03 030926Z

AND A GENERAL REEVALUATION BY THE FAR LEFT OF ITS FUTURE

ROLE AND STRATEGY ARE PROBABLE. FAR-LEFT INFLUENCE IN THE MILITARY, CONSIDERABLE PRIOR TO NOV 25, WAS GREATLY DIMINISHED BY THE COUP, AND THE ULTRAS HAVE TAKEN VIRTUALLY NO ROLE IN NEGOTIATIONS FOR THE REVISION OF THE ARMED FORCES MOVEMENT - PARTIES PACT. DESPITE IT REVERSES, HOWEVER, THE FAR LEFT RETAINS CONSIDERABLE TROUBLE-MAKING POTENTIAL, AND IS UNLIKELY TO FADE AWAY. END SUMMARY.

1. BACKGROUND:

PRIOR TO THE NOV 25 COUP ATTEMPT, THE NUMEROUS POLITICAL PARTIES AND ORGANIZATIONS OF THE PORTUGUESE FAR LEFT HAD PLAYED AN ESSENTIALLY PERIPHERAL, IF HIGHLY VISIBLE, ROLE IN THE STRUGGLE BEING WAGED BETWEEN THE PORTUGUESE COMMUNIST PARTY (PCP) AND ITS NON-COMMUNIST OPPONENTS. THIS SECONDARY ROLE WAS PARTLY A QUESTION OF NUMBERS. TOTAL MEMBERSHIP OF ALL FAR LEFT GROUPS DOES NOT REACH 8,000; THE SEVEN FAR LEFT PARTIES WHICH COMPETED IN THE APRIL 1975 CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS TOGETHER POLLED ONLY 224,616 VOTES, 4.2 PERCENT OF THE TOTAL. THE FAR LEFT WAS NONETHELESS TAKEN SERIOUSLY BY OTHER POLITICAL ACTORS FOR A NUMBER OF REASONS:

(A) THE ARMED MILITIAS: AT LEAST THREE FAR LEFT GROUPS, THE REVOLUTIONARY PARTY OF THE PROLETARIAT - REVOLUTIONARY BRIGADES (PRP-BR), THE LEAGUE FOR UNION AND REVOLUTIONARY ACTION (LUAR), AND THE MOVEMENT OF THE SOCIALIST LEFT (MES), WERE KNOWN TO MAINTAIN ARMED CIVILIEAN MILITIAS PRIOR TO NOV 25. RESPECT FOR THE OPERATIONAL CAPABILITY OF THESE FORCES WAS BOLSTERED BY THE FACT THAT TWO GROUPS, LUAR AND THE PRP-BR, HAD A HISTORY OF TERRORIST ACTIVITY AGAINST THE FORMER REGIME, WHILE ALL THREE WERE KNOWN TO HAVE RECEIVED LARGE QUANTITIES OF AUTOMATIC WEAPONS, MUNITIONS, AND OTHER HARDWARE FROM THEIR MILITARY SYMPATHIZERS. IN THE IMMEDIATE PRE-COUP PERIOD, MOREOVER, THE FAR LEFT HAD ENGAGED IN ALARMING DISPLAYS OF SABER-RATTLING; THE REVOLUTIONARY BRIGADES OF THE PRP-BR HAD GONE UNDERGROUND -- WITH CONSIDERABLE FANFARE -- IN EARLY NOVEMBER, WHILE PRP-BR SECGEN ISABEL DO CARMO HAD ANNOUNCED ONLY DAYS BEFORE THE COUP THAT CONDITIONS WERE RIPE FOR ARMED INSURRECTION.

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PAGE 03 LISBON 00703 01 OF 03 030926Z

(B) THE MILITARY CONNECTION: IMPORTANT MILITARY LEADERS SUCH AS COPCON HEAD OTELO CARVALHO AND ARMY CHIEF OF STAFF CARLOS FABIAO, AS WELL AS TROOP COMMANDERS OF SUCH KEY LISBON MILITARY REGION (RML) UNITS AS THE LISBON LIGHT ARTILLERY REGIMENT (RALIS) AND THE MILITARY POLICE REGIMENT (RPM), HAD SHOWN THEMSELVES SYMPATHETIC TO FAR LEFT POSITIONS. THE FAR LEFT HAD ALSO GAINED CONSIDERABLE INFLUENCE AMONG THE LOWER RANKS, ESPECIALLY IN THE RML, THROUGH SKILLFUL EXPLOITATION

OF RADICAL SOLDIERS ORGANIZATIONS LIKE SOLDIERS UNITED WILL
WIN (SUV).

(C) STREET SUPPORT: THE FAR LEFT WAS ALSO RESPECTED FOR ITS
ABILITY TO PUT PEOPLE IN THE STREETS. THIS RESPECT WAS LARGELY
UNDESERVED. IT DERIVED MAINLY FROM THE FAR LEFT'S HISTORICAL
ASSOCIATION WITH THE CONCEPT OF POPULAR POWER, UNDER THE GUISE
OF WHICH THE PCP SOUGHT IN THE LATE SUMMER AND FALL OF 1975
FIRST TO PROP UP THE GONCALVES GOVERNMENT AND THEN TO TOPPLE
OR PARALYZE THE AZEVEDO GOVERNMENT. THE FAR LEFT WAS INVOLVED
IN MANY IMPRESSIVE POPULAR POWER DEMONSTRATIONS PRIOR
TO NOV 25, BUT THE SUCCESS OF THESE EVENTS WAS DUE TO THE
EFFORTS OF THE PCP RATHER THAN TO ANY CROWD-DRAWING CAPABILITIES
OF THE FAR LEFT.

(D) THE PCP CONNECTION: THE PCP'S ADOPTION OF POPULAR POWER
AS THE COVERING BANNER FOR ITS ATTACKS ON THE AZEVEDO GOVERNMENT
DID, HOWEVER, MAKE POSSIBLE A TACIT ALLIANCE BETWEEN THE
COMMUNISTS AND FAR LEFT. THIS RELATIONSHIP, ALTHOUGH FRAGILE
AND MARKED ON BOTH SIDES BY FREQUENT DOUBLECROSS, WAS VALUABLE

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PAGE 01 LISBON 00703 02 OF 03 021507Z

12
ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 3 LISBON 0703

TO THE ULTRA'S IN THAT, FOR THE FIRST TIME, IT GAVE THEM
AN ALLY WITH THE ORGANIZATIONAL AND NUMERICAL MUSCLE TO
CREDIBLY CHALLENGE THEIR NON-COMMUNIST RIVALS.

(E) RECKLESSNESS: A LESS TANGIBLE ASSET, BUT PERHAPS THE
MOST SIGNIFICANT IN THE FAR LEFT'S POLITICAL ARSENAL, WAS AN
INSTITUTIONAL SINGLENESS OF PURPOSE AND COMMITMENT
WHICH AT TIMES BORDERED ON RECKLESSNESS. THIS QUALITY ALLOWED
FAR LEFT GROUPS IN SUCH CASES AS THE "REPUBLICA" AND SUCCESSIVE
"RADIO RENASCENCA" CRISES TO HAVE A FAR GREATER IMPACT
THAN THEIR NUMERICAL STRENGTH WOULD HAVE MERITED. MORE IMPORTANT,
WHEN COMBINED WITH THE THREAT POSED BY THE ULTRA'S ARMED
MILITIAS AND THEIR LINKS TO THE RADICAL MILITARY AND PCP, IT
GAVE RISE TO THE FEAR THAT, IF SIGNIFICANTLY PROVOKED, THE
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PAGE 02 LISBON 00703 02 OF 03 021507Z

FAR LEFT MIGHT SERVE AS A POLITICAL "CATALYST," PRECIPITATING
BY SOME IRRESPONSIBLE ACTION A VIOLENT CONFRONTATION BETWEEN
OTHER, MORE IMPORTANT POLITICAL FORCES.

2. FAR LEFT ROLE IN COUP:

(A) AS THE OFFICIAL REPORT OF THE COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO
THE ABORTIVE NOV 25 COUP MADE CLEAR, THE FAR LEFT WAS HEAVILY
IMPLICATED IN BOTH THE PLANNING AND EXECUTION OF THE REBELLION.
NOT ONLY DID THE FAR LEFT, ALONG WITH THE PCP, BEAR PRIME
RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE TENSE POLITICAL CLIMATE WHICH PRECEDED
THE COUP, BUT SUCH GROUPS AS THE PRP-BR, LUAR, AND THE UDP
HAD, AS EARLY AS OCTOBER 1, SOUGHT TO PERSUADE COPCON CHIEF
OTELLO TO LEAD A REBELLION. WELL PRIOR TO NOV 25, THE PRP-BR
HAD, WITH MILITARY POLICE ASSISTANCE, SET UP A SOPHISTICATED
RADIO NET FOR COORDINATING TROOP AND CROWD MOVEMENTS IN THE
EVENT OF A CONFRONTATION. DURING THE REBELLION, MEMBERS OF
THE UNITARY REVOLUTIONARY FRONT (FUR) ISSUED CALLS FOR POPULAR
POWER ORGANIZATIONS TO ASSEMBLE AT THE BARRACKS OF REBEL FORCES
WHILE UDP DEPUTY TO THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY AMERICO DUARTE
WAS DISCOVERED IN THE LISBON MILITARY POLICE BARRACKS WHEN
IT WAS TAKEN BY LOYAL COMMANDOS NOV 26.

(B) ROLE OF ARMED MILITIAS: THE MOST REMARKABLE ASPECT OF
THE FAR LEFT'S PERFORMANCE IN THE NOV 25 COUP ATTEMPT WAS ITS
FAILURE TO SERIOUSLY COMMIT ITS MUCH-VAUNTED CIVILIAN MILITIAS.
ARMED, UNIFORMED MES, PRP, AND LUAR MEMBERS WERE PRESENT AT
THE TANCOS PARATROOPER SCHOOL DURING THE REBELLION, BUT FIRED

NO SHOTS IN ANGER. SHOTS FROM UNIDENTIFIED CIVILIANS PRODUCED THE ONLY TWO LOYALIST CASUALTIES IN THE NOV 26 TAKING OF THE LISBON MILITARY POLICE BARRACKS. EXCEPT FOR THESE ISOLATED INCIDENTS, HOWEVER, THE MILITIAS PLAYED NO ROLE IN THE COUP. THEY HAVE, MOREOVER, REMAINED EQUALLY QUIESCENT SINCE NOV 25.

3. MEANING OF THE COUP FOR THE FAR LEFT: THE FAR LEFT EMERGED AS THE BIG LOSER FROM THE NOV 25 COUP ATTEMPT.

(A) MILITIAS' CREDIBILITY TARNISHED: THE UNIMPRESSIVE MILITARY PERFORMANCE OF THE FAR LEFT'S CIVILIAN MILITIAS DURING THE NOV 25 COUP SERIOUSLY UNDERMINED THE CREDIBILITY
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PAGE 03 LISBON 00703 02 OF 03 021507Z

OF THESE FORCES AND CONSEQUENTLY DIMINISHED THEIR VALUE AS A FAR LEFT POLITICAL ASSET. NO ONE IS YET TOTALLY DISCOUNTING THE TROUBLE-MAKING CAPACITY OF THE MILITIAS; THEY RETAIN THE ARMAMENT, MUNITIONS, AND EXPERIENCE TO ENGAGE IN GUERRILLA OR TERRORIST ACTIVITIES AT ANY TIME. THE COUP DEMONSTRATED, HOWEVER, THAT THESE FORCES WOULD NOT STAND UP TO WELL DISCIPLINED, DETERMINED GOVERNMENT FORCES IN A MAJOR CONFRONTATION.

(B) FUR SPLIT: FAR LEFT UNITY, WHICH HAD TAKEN A STEP FORWARD IN AUGUST 1975 WITH THE FORMATION OF THE UNITARY REVOLUTIONARY FRONT (FUR), WAS ANOTHER CASUALTY OF THE ABORTIVE COUP. LESS THAN THREE WEEKS AFTER NOV 25, LUAR AND THE COMMUNIST INTERNATIONALIST LEAGUE (LCI) SEIZED ON RELATIVELY INSIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES WITH OTHER FUR MEMBERS AS A PRETEXT FOR ABANDONING FUR AND DISASSOCIATING THEMSELVES FROM MES AND THE PRP-BR WHO, PRIOR TO THE JAN 20 RELEASE OF THE OFFICIAL NOV 25 REPORT, WERE CONSIDERED THE FUR MEMBERS MOST DEEPLY INVOLVED IN THE COUP ATTEMPT. THE FELLOW-TRAVELING PORTUGUESE DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT (MDP) SIMPLY STOPPED ATTENDING MEETINGS AND WAS EXPELLED BY A RUMP FRONT. WHILE FORMER FUR MEMBERS WERE CAREFUL NOT TO RULE OUT FUTURE FORMAL OR TACIT COOPERATION WITH REMAINING MEMBERS, THEY GAVE THE DEFINITE IMPRESSION THAT THE RULE OF THE DAY WAS "EVERY MAN FOR HIMSELF."

(C) NEW LOW IN RELATIONS WITH PCP: THE PRE-COUP FAR LEFT TACIT ALLIANCE WITH THE PCP WAS DEVASTATED BY THE ABORTIVE COUP. FIGHTING FOR ITS OWN SURVIVAL, THE COMMUNISTS ATTEMPTED TO SADDLE THE ULTRAS WITH EXCLUSIVE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE REBELLION, DENOUNCING THE FAR LEFT'S "ADVENTURISM" AND "INTRANSIGENCE" IN THE STRONGEST OF TERMS. THE FAR LEFT, PARTICULARLY THE PRP-BR AND MES, COUNTER-CHARGED THAT THE PCP HAD TOUCHED OFF THE REVOLT, THEN WITHDRAWN, IN AN ATTEMPT TO DESTROY THE FAR LEFT AND ITS MILITARY SUPPORTERS.

MARXIST-LENINISTS SUCH AS THE UDP CAST A POX UPON BOTH HOUSES, LUMPING FUR AND THE PCP TOGETHER IN RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE UPRISING. EVEN WITH RELATIONS AT AN ALL TIME NADIR, HOWEVER, THE POSSIBILITY OF A FUTURE RAPPROACHMENT COULD NOT BE EXCLUDED. IN POST-COUP STATEMENTS THE PCP LEFT

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PAGE 01 LISBON 00703 03 OF 03 021442Z

12

ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 3 OF 3 LISBON 703

THE DOOR OPEN FOR FUTURE COOPERATION ON ITS TERMS, WHILE THE LCI, PRP-BR, AND MES JOINED THE PCP, -- ALBEIT WITH CONSIDERABLE GRUMBLINGS ABOUT ITS "REVISIONIST" CHARACTER -- IN A MAJOR JAN 17 ANTI-GOVERNMENT RALLY.

4. CHANGES IN LEADERSHIP AND POLICY:

(A) LEADERSHIP: THE ABORTIVE NOV 25 COUP PRODUCED SOME SIGNIFICANT CHANGES IN FAR LEFT LEADERSHIP. BY AGGRAVATING EXISTING TENSIONS BETWEEN SUPPORTERS AND RIVALS OF SECGEN

HERMINIO PALMA INACIO, THE REVOLT PROMPTED A MAJOR, AND PERHAPS FATAL, SPLIET WITHIN LUAR. DISSIDENTS, WHO INCLUDED A MAJORITY OF THE PARTY'S PROVINCIAL ORGANIZATIONS AND A SIGNIFICANT PORTION OF ITS CENTRAL CADRES, WERE LED BY LUAR
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PAGE 02 LISBON 00703 03 OF 03 021442Z

NUMBER-TWO MANUEL MARQUES. THEY HAVE INDICATED THEY WILL NOT FORM NEW ORGANIZATION. PROBABLY DUE TO HIS HAVING BEEN CAUGHT "IN FLAGRANTE DELICTO" BY COMMANDOS NOV 26, UDP CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY DEPUTY AMERICO DUARTE HAS BEEN REPLACED IN HIS JOB BY FORMER POPULAR SINGER AFONSO DIAS. DUARTE HAS RETURNED TO THE LISNAVE SHIPYARDS WHERE HIS RHETORICAL SKILLS ARE PRESUMABLY FINDING A MORE APPRECIATIVE AUDIENCE THAN THEY DID IN THE SAO BENTO HEMI-CIRCLE. PRP-BR SEC GEN ISABEL DO CARMO, ALTHOUGH UNCHARACTERISTICALLY SUBDUED SINE THE COUP ATTEMPT, APPEARS TO RETAIN A FIRM HAND ON HER PARTY. THE SAME GOES FOR POPULAR SOCIALIST FRONT (FSP) LEADER MANUEL SERRA.

ARNALDO MATOS, VICTOR SHORTLY BEFORE NOV 25 IN A STRUGGLE FOR CONTROL OF THE PARTY WITH FORMER "LUTA POPULAR" EDITOR SALDANHA SANCHES, REMAINS AT THE HEAD OF THE REORGANIZING MOVEMENT OF THE PROLETARIAT PARTY (MRPP), WHICH PLAYED NO ACTIVE ROLE IN THE COUP ATTEMPT.

(B) POLICY: THE GENERAL DIMINUTION OF FAR LEFT POLITICAL STRENGTH AS A RESULT OF THE NOV 25 COUP ATTEMPT WILL UNDOUBTEDLY FORCE THE ULTRAS TO REEVALUATE THEIR FUTURE ROLE. MES, LCI, AND THE RUMP LUAR HAVE ANNOUNCED NATIONAL CONGRESSES IN EARLY 1976 FOR PRECISELY THIS PURPOSE. ALTHOUGH THIS PROCESS OF REEVALUATION IS UNLIKELY TO RESULT IN ANY SIGNIFICANT ALTERATION OF THE FAR LEFT'S ULTIMATE GOALS, IT MAY LEAD TO SOME REDEFINTION OF TACTICS.

5. THE FAR LEFT AND THE MILITARY:

(A) PRE-COUP RELATIONS: PRIOR TO NOV 25, THE FAR LEFT'S ATTITUDE TOWARD MILITARY AND AFM HAD BEEN AMBIVALENT. ON ONE HAND THERE WAS A GENERAL RECOGNITION THAT THE AFM HAD MADE SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTION TO WORKERS CAUSE BY OVERTHROWING FORMER REGIME. ON THE OTHER HAND THERE WAS, TO GREATER OR LESSER DEGREE, FEELING THAT THE AFM, AS THE OUTGROWTH OF AN ESSENTIALLY OFFICER CASTE, CONTAINED WITHIN IT SEEDS OF REPRESSIVE MILITARY DICTATORSHIP. WITH THE EXCEPTION OF POPULAR SOCIALIST FRONT (FSP), THEREFORE, FAR LEFT GROUPS OPPOSED INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF THE AFM AND REFUSED TO SIGN THE AFM-PARTIES CONSTITUTIONAL PACT IN APRIL 1975. THESE ATTITUDES DID NOT, HOWEVER, PREVENT THE FAR LEFT FROM CULTIVATING
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PAGE 03 LISBON 00703 03 OF 03 021442Z

AND MAINTAINING VALUABLE CONTACTS WITHIN THE AFM AND THE MILITARY IN GENERAL, ESPECIALLY IN THE ENLISTED RANKS. THE JULY 1975 AFM DOCUMENT ESPOUSING THE DOCTRINE OF POPULAR POWER WAS DOMINATED BY FAR LEFT IDEAS. NOR WAS THE MILITARY FAR LEFT CONNECTION ONLY IDEOLOGICAL. COPCON COMMANDER OTELO CARVALHO WAS WIDELY ASSUMED TO BE SLEEPING WITH PRP LEADER ISABEL DO CARMO. THE NOV 25 ABORTIVE COUP ELIMINATED FAR LEFT INFLUENCE IN THE TOP MILITARY COMMAND STRUCTURE AND GREATLY DIMINISHED IT IN THE RANKS. SINCE THE COUP THE ULTRAS HAVE SUPPORTED EFFORTS TO FREE NOV 25 DETAINEES. THE HAVE PLAYED VIRTUALLY NO ROLE IN NEGOTIATIONS ON THE AFM-PARTIES PACT REVISION.

6. THE ECONOMY:

THE FAR LEFT COUP ATTEMPT HAS HAD NO IMPACT ON BASIC ECONOMIC POSITIONS OF FAR LEFT. IT CONTINUES TO ADVOCATE TOTAL WORKER CONTROL OF ALL ECONOMIC ACTIVITY, TOTAL NATIONAL ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE, AND EXPANDED TRADE WITH THE THIRD WORLD. SINCE THE COUP, INDIVIDUAL ORGANIZATIONS HAVE EXPRESSED CONCERN THAT THE GOVERNMENT WILL SUPPRESS WORKERS COMMISSIONS AND REVERSE NATIONALIZATION AND AGRARIAN REFORM PROGRAMS. SOME GROUPS, NOTABLY THE UDP, HAVE SOUGHT TO MAKE POLITICAL CAPITAL OF PUBLIC DISCONTENT OVER THE GOVERNMENT'S ECONOMIC PROGRAM BY ASSERTING THAT ITS MEASURES ARE "ANTI-WORKER" AND "ANTI-POOR."

7. FUTURE PROSPECTS:

DESPITE ITS REVERSES, THE FAR LEFT RETAINS CONSIDERABLE TROUBLE-MAKING POTENTIAL. WITH ITS PROVEN PENCHANT FOR VIOLENCE AND ITS MEANS FOR ENGAGING IN TERRORIST ACTIVITIES INTACT, IT COULD STILL ACT AS A CATALYST IN PRODUCING A CONFRONTATION BETWEEN OTHER POLITICAL FORCES. ITS LEADERS AND ACTIVISTS, MANY OF THEM VETERANS OF THE STRUGGLE AGAINST THE FORMER REGIME, ARE NOT QUITTERS; THEY CAN BE EXPECTED TO ATTEMPT TO RECOUP THEIR LOSSES AND WILL BE ALERT TO OPPORTUNITIES TO DO SO. THEREFORE, THOUGH MORE THAN EVER OUT OF THE POLITICAL MAINSTREAM, THE FAR LEFT IS UNLIKELY TO FADE AWAY.

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